

Drug Abuse in Wasatch County on the Increase

This is the first in a three part series of articles dealing with the drug abuse problem which exists in Wasatch County.

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Specials Writer

February 2 several law enforcement agencies coordinated in Heber City to intercept the sale of a half-pound of 73 percent pure cocaine, street valued at \$88,000. A quarter-pound marijuana and .22 calibre automatic pistol were also confiscated in the arrest that eliminated more than six months investigation and undercover work by the State Narcotics Bureau and Uintah Basin officers. While the heart of the investigation was in Uintah and Duchesne counties, Heber City seems no less involved in drug trafficking. But just how extensive is the problem here?

Lance Gardner, Wasatch County deputy sheriff, says Heber's drug problem "exploded 20 years ago." Gardner, along with fellow deputy Steve Ridge, has been giving drug presentations throughout the community alerting residents to the problem and educating them about the effects of drug abuse. "The problem is large and getting larger," he says. "It's big, big business, and because it's such a big business, it's not going to go away."

Sharyn Paradise, director of the Drug and Alcohol Prevention Program recently established in Heber, says "rural areas have as big of a problem with drugs as the cities, but they have fewer resources so the problems go on." Paradise doesn't deal very much with "recreational" drug use

but with individuals who have such an abuse problem, their functioning is impaired in some way. Of those clients Paradise is seeing, some are high school and middle school students.

School principals admit there is a drug problem in their schools. High School Principal John Carlile says, "There are students identified as having a problem and we are aware of them, but the extent of the (drug problem) is impossible to guess."

Bill Dudley, principal of the middle school, hasn't had an incident involving drugs this year, but he is sure they're being used. A recent bomb scare at the school required police officers to search student lockers but they found no evidence of drugs. "Yet," Dudley says, "I feel it would be naive to presume that drugs aren't being used."

In coordination with the State Division of Alcoholism and Drugs, Paradise is going to be administering an extensive survey to students in the Wasatch School District, providing she receives the funding she needs. Carlile and Dudley both agree the survey should provide significant information that will help address the drug problem.

While cocaine is becoming the popular drug choice these days, it's a high-priced item that most, especially younger people, cannot afford at \$150 a gram. An admitted drug user, to be known as John, says marijuana is still the most widely used illegal drug. "Marijuana is what's hot. You know, it's the high item on the market. You buy it cheap and in small quantities, like a joint." Marijuana prices range from \$5-\$50 a quarter ounce.

Drug abuse in Heber is

"average", according to John, with the use in the high school no exception. He estimates that six out of every 10 students have tried marijuana and three remain on "regular use." Regular use means getting stoned once a day or at least once a week.

Small quantities of marijuana can be found growing within the county itself, but the remainder of the illegal drugs found in the area must be transported in. According to street sources for the Sheriff's office, an 80-pound bale of marijuana comes into the valley every 30 to 60 days.

And then there is cocaine. "The favorite that's for the rich people," as John phrases it. "There is a lot of good-quality, hard-grade cocaine that comes from Park City." He says the recent drug bust should make everybody aware of just how closely Heber and Park City are connected.

The Heber resident, arrested in the cocaine bust was just the middleman in the drug sale. Like him, there are many others who distribute the drugs once they come into town. John says the people who sell drugs are either locals who have lived in Heber all their lives or transients passing through who stop at one of the bars and sell a few drugs. One Wasatch High School student interviewed says he knows of five students just within his school who sell drugs.

The largest group in Utah to use drugs for non-medical reasons is still the 18-25 year olds, but it's not an exclusive club. Gardner says the youngest person arrested in the county has been an 8-year-old and the oldest, John collaborates and says he knows individuals who purchase drugs with their retirement checks.

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EDITORIAL

A recent report issued by the Utah State Board of Education reveals some very staggering statistics about the Drug Problem that faces the students, parents and residents of Utah.

On the average, drug trafficking in the state of Utah has increased 140 percent since 1975.

This is only part of the survey that the heads of 81 federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies have compiled.

Other alarming results of the survey are:

- . In 1982, illegal narcotics were seized by law enforcement officers in Utah on 4,000 occasions.

- . Almost every harmful narcotic substance is more readily available today in Utah than ever before.

- . The average drug offender in Utah began to abuse drugs at the age of 16; next are ages 15, 17, and 14.

- . Sixty-four percent of the respondents said student drug abuse education programs are inadequate in most parts of Utah and problems in intermediate, high schools, and colleges are serious.

- . Up to 75 percent of all crimes committed for gain in Utah are caused by drug abuse and drug trafficking.

- . Sixty-three percent of investigated drug offenses involve marijuana; 16 percent cocaine; 4 percent hashish and hallucinogens.

- . Marijuana is 85 percent more available currently than in 1975; cocaine 91 percent more available; heroin 17 percent more available.

- . The total number of reported seizures of illegal drugs during 1982 in Utah was 3,058; among them were 1,631 for marijuana and 196 LSD.

- . Eighty-seven percent of the respondents said the public is not aware of the true extent of the drug problems in their area.

- . Respondents to the survey said marijuana was most frequently abused by intermediate and secondary schoolstudents, followed by metamphetamines, cocaine, and barbituates.

- . The most common sources of drugs of school students were other students(72%) and adults other than parents (28%).

Now, we have completed a three part series on the Alcohol and Drug abuse in the Heber Valley, and we feel that there is a serious problem that is neglected here.

We encourage parents, teachers, children, and friends of those that abuse drugs to help the person realize the problems and hazards of drug abuse.